NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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THE CONSPIRACY OF AN EMPIRE

OR NICK CARTER'S BRAVEST ACT

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

"Never!" cried the woman. "Take that! We die together!" and hurled the bomb straight at Nick Carter's head, but the detective caught the missile, and averted a terrible explosion.

Announcement. Readers of this weekly will find that the stories have been increased more than one-third over their former length. This increase is made in response to a general demand that the weekly be issued more frequently than once a week. To do that is impossible, but we have increased the length to show our appreciation of the favor with which these stories have been received. You will find that there is no drop in the quality with the increase. From this on, these stories will be the longest as well as the best of their kind published.

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THE CONSPIRACY OF AN EMPIRE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Bravest Act.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DETECTIVE'S CLEVER SCHEME.

A card was taken to the private study of the detective and given into his hand. It bore an almost unpronounceable Japanese name, but underneath it, in excellent English, was written:

"I wish to see you in the capacity of a representative of the Japanese Government."

"Tell the gentleman that I will be down in a moment," he told his servant; and then, having completed a letter he was engaged in writing, he descended the stairs and entered his reception room.

"Why, general," he exclaimed, advancing quickly and stretching out his hand, "this is an unexpected pleasure, indeed. But why did you send me a false card? And why are you so evidently in disguise?"

"Ah, Mr. Carter, it is true that I am here in disguise and I wondered if you would know me. I am here on most important business and in great secrecy."

"I think I would know Gen. Yagarosi in any disguise he might assume," said the detective, smiling; and then he added, quickly: "I am aware, of course, of your great personal trouble, but your call is not because of that, is it?"

"I am here, Mr. Carter, on a matter of state, and at the command of my emperor."

"Indeed!"

"Are we entirely isolated in this room? I mean, is there no fear of interruption?"

"None whatever. But, stay—follow me to my 'den.' There are few whom I receive there, but I shall be happy to make an exception of you."

"You are aware," said the general as soon as they were seated together in that remarkable room, "that we have a prince of the blood traveling in this country at the present time, are you not?"

"Certainly. Everybody in the United States is aware of it."

"Has it ever occurred to you that he might be kidnaped?"

"Kidnaped! Here? Hardly."

"Russia's arms are long and strong, Mr. Carter."

"But, general, such an act would be an offense against every international law, and no country on earth would dare to undertake such a thing as that."

"Russia dares all things—and Russia has a way of escaping responsibility and leaving others to take the consequences."

"You will have to be more explicit with me, general."

"I am here, Mr. Carter, because there is a conspiracy on foot to kidnap the prince."

"But——"

The general raised one hand, and said, quickly:

"Pray, allow me to continue."

The detective leaned back in his chair and was silent.

"There is a conspiracy," continued the general. "Of that we have positive information. Official Russia is not known, and is never to be known in the affair, no matter how it may terminate."

"I see the point you make, general. Russia directs the thing, but remains in the background; and Russia would be the first to cry out against the outrage, if it should succeed. That, and other arguments of the same sort, is your position; but let me ask you: What possible benefit could Russia derive from such an act?"

"Russia is deep and strong and silent; her methods comprise an endless chain to which there is no beginning and no end. So who can say what benefit she would derive? Among ourselves, we can only think of one."

"And what is that?"

"Apparently it is unimportant, but it might have a far reaching effect."

"What is it?"

"If our prince were kidnaped and should disappear, and we should raise a great outcry about it, insisting that it had been done at the instigation of Russia—as we would know to be the truth—Russia would announce her innocence and her morality to the civilized world, and she would denounce it as a Japanese trick to gain sympathy with the powers."

"While really you regard the whole conspiracy as a Russian trick to gain that very sympathy with the powers, using you as a catspaw, eh?"

"That is the only explanation we can give to it; but there are doubtless others that are deeper and more malignant."

"And what do you wish me to do in the matter?"

"Protect him without ever permitting him to know that he is in danger."

"Humph! That is easier said than done."

"Our emperor believes that you can accomplish all things."

"I'm very much obliged to him, I'm sure. Now, what do you know about the conspiracy?"

"We know that it exists. We know that there are three men and women concerned in it, and——"

"How do you know that?"

"Through our agents in St. Petersburg."

"They may be misinformed."

"In reply to that I will say that they are men who would not make a positive statement on such an important matter without positive evidence of its truth."

"Is your ministry convinced of its truth?"

"Absolutely."

"Even Marquis Ito?"

"Even the marquis."

"In that case there is doubtless strong foundation for the belief."

"There certainly is."

"What do you know about these three men and three women?"

"Nothing, save that they have been carefully selected for the work."

"By whom?"

The general shrugged his shoulders.

"By Russia, of course," he said.

"But Russia will never appear in the matter."

"By Russia's agents, then."

"You know nothing of the personality of any of these people?"

"Nothing."

"Merely that there are three men and three women."

"That is all."

"Are they here in this country now?"

"They should have been here a week or more already if the information of our agents was correct."

"Were you given a description of them?"

"No; there was no description obtainable. The information came through the chance overhearing of a plot when it was discussed in St. Petersburg."

"Do you know anything concerning their plan of operations?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Then, in fact, all that you do know is that there is such a conspiracy, and that there are six people here to carry it out."

"That is all. Our information is, necessarily, very meager. It is difficult for our agents in St. Petersburg to get messages to us. Many of them are lost and never reach us at all. Whatever is sent to us has been couched in as few words as possible, and, of course, it must inevitably be in cipher."

"The prince is in Washington now, is he not?"

"He is."

"Then the conspirators are there also."

"I should say that is most likely the case."

"General, tell me why you thought it necessary to come here under cover."

"I was ordered to do so."

"It would not have been your own choice, eh?"

"Not at all."

"What were the mikado's reasons for desiring it?"

"He does not wish the prince to know that I am here at all."

"Ah! I see. Are you personally known to the prince?"

"Very well, indeed, sir."

"And you are friendly?"

"We are."

"What sort of a chap is the prince?"

"One of the few perfect noblemen on earth."

"Is he a brave man?"

"Among the bravest of Japanese."

"Suppose we take him into our confidence?"

"That is out of the question, Mr. Carter."

"Why so?"

"Because I have particular orders to the contrary."

"And you do not feel at liberty to transgress them, even if it should appear to you to be necessary to do so?"

"A Japanese officer always takes his orders literally and carries them out as they are given to him—or not at all."

"Is the prince fond of the ladies?"

"He would be less than a man if he were not."

"Why, in your opinion, were the three women included in this expedition?"

"Probably because of their greater talents at intrigue. The soft hand of a woman can accomplish what the harsh fist of a man can never perform."

"True; still, there is some other reason than that for the presence of the women. And you have no idea whatever of their identities?"

"No more than you have."

"Well, general, I confess I don't at the present moment see what we are to do unless we go to Washington and organize an invisible bodyguard around the prince—that is, unless we take the prince into our confidence."

"And that we cannot do."

"You can't; but I can."

The general rose from his chair with great dignity.

"Mr. Carter," he said, calmly, "unless you consent to regard my orders in this matter as extending to you, I must——"

"There, there, general. Let it be so. It would make our task so much easier, however, if we could enlist his personal interest in the matter."

"I grant you that, but it cannot be done. The prince must not know."

"What do you suppose those six persons would do with him, once they had him in their power?" asked the detective, after a moment of thought.

"God only knows. I cannot answer that."

"Do you suppose, for example, that they would murder him?"

"No, no; we have never supposed that."

"Then what? Take him to Russia?"

"I should say that would be what they would attempt to do."

"My dear general, that would be the very last thing on earth they would attempt to do, for the very good reason that it would be impossible."

"All things are possible, although many are highly improbable," replied the general, in the calm tone of a fatalist.

"Suppose, for example," continued the detective, "that the prince were to disappear to-night; do you know what would happen?"

"There would be some excitement, I suppose."

"Some excitement! Well, yes, that about explains it. Every policeman in the United States, every detective in the United States, every newspaper reporter in the United States, and a whole lot of others would be searching for him as soon as it was known positively that he was missing."

"You do things so strangely in this country, Mr. Carter."

"Yes; and we also have a way of doing them thoroughly."

"You think, then, that they could not get him out of the country to take him to Russia?"

"I know they could not—unless——"

"Ha! Unless what?"

"Unless, for example, the conspirators happened to have a ship—some ordinary sailing vessel in readiness; one that had already cleared, you know—in readiness. H'm! Your remarks have given me an idea."

"I am glad of that."

"Look here, general, does that order of yours about secrecy extend to any person besides the prince himself?"

"So long as the prince does not discover that he is in danger, you have *carte blanche* to proceed as you think best, Mr. Carter."

"Then there is one man of whom we will make a confidant."

"Who is that, if I may ask?"

"A certain Mr. Wilkie, who resides in Washington. Are you prepared to start for the capital to-night?"

"I am prepared to start anywhere at a moment's notice."

"Like all good soldiers, eh? Now, let me ask you—suppose you were to meet the prince face to face in your present so-called disguise, do you think he would not know you?"

"I had thought he would not—yes."

"If you should see an ostrich with its head buried in the sand you would still know that it was an ostrich, wouldn't you?"

"Assuredly."

"Your prince would know you as quickly as you would recognize the ostrich. I'll have to make some changes in your appearance—and that is part of the idea I mentioned a moment ago."

"Very well."

"Are you willing and are you prepared to act under any orders in this matter?"

"My orders from the emperor are to that effect."

"Good! If I am not mistaken, you and the prince are of about the same stature and build."

"Yes; we are."

"And weight?"

"About the same, I think."

"Good again. Do you happen to know where you can procure some princely toggery? But, of course, you do not; you are a stranger here."

"I do not understand that word toggery. What does it mean?"

"Clothing; princely toggery means the sort of clothes that a prince would wear."

"Ah! I understand you now. I have a friend in the city who is a Japanese merchant, and who imports to this country everything that is of the finest."

"Then we'll call upon your friend and have him fix us out with some 'princely toggery.'"

"What do you intend to do?"

"Do? Why, I intend to have the best sport of my long career, as any old-timer would say. I intend to have more fun with these Russian conspirators than a whole basket of monkeys. I intend to have the time of my life."

"But I do not understand."

"General, I'm going to promote you on the field of battle—I'm going to touch you with my wand and turn you into a prince."

"I beg that you will not joke with me on so serious a subject, Mr. Carter."

"Joke with you? I was never more serious in my life."

"But—turn me into a prince? How? By what means?"

"By means of a little witchery I sometimes make use of. I have a very good picture of your prince here. You shall see it."

Nick opened his desk, and presently produced a photograph which he gave to the general.

"Is it not a good likeness?" he asked.

"Perfect."

"The prince gave it to me himself when I was in Japan. I have seen him once since he arrived in this country, and he has not changed in his appearance. Do you understand me now, general?"

"No, I am still in the dark."

"I shall make of you a perfect counterpart of the prince—so like him that if you met face to face through the frame of a mirror from which the glass had been removed he would believe you to be his own reflection."

"But can you do that?"

"Certainly I can do it."

"But to what end?"

"To the end that the conspirators shall abduct the wrong prince, that is all; to the end that the prince they seek shall appear to fall an easy victim to their wiles; to the end that we will force them to show their hands and thus learn who and what they are, and who and what they pretend to be."

"But the prince—will he not wonder that a counterpart of his is seen in Washington?"

"The prince shall know nothing about it; I guarantee you that."

"But, if I am in Washington with you in the guise of the prince, will he not hear of it?"

"You will not be in the guise of the prince only at intervals. For the most part you will be a simple Japanese merchant who has the good fortune to resemble the prince somewhat, but in face only, for I will so arrange your regular clothing that your figure will not suggest his at all, and your boots so that you will walk with a decided limp."

"I begin to understand."

"Certainly. You will impersonate the prince only on occasion, and at such times and places and in such a manner that he will not be likely to hear about it. Besides, that dear good friend of mine, whom I mentioned a moment ago—Mr. Wilkie—will see to it for me that no knowledge gets to the prince which we do not wish him to possess."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Carter."

"I'm going to have some wonderful surprises out of this case, general."

"I place myself entirely in your hands."

"That is right. Come now. I will call a carriage and we will drive to the establishment of your friend, the

merchant. There, you shall select one or two such costumes as you think would be appropriate to the prince; two will be sufficient, I think. After that we will return here, and I will transform you."

"And then——"

"To-night, we will take the train for Washington. We will install ourselves at a quiet hotel I know and commence operations."

"But the prince knows you. He will see you and recognize you."

"It would make no difference if he did; but he won't, for when we take the train to-night, I shall be as much a Jap as yourself—in a word, I shall be your attendant."

"I don't understand; do you mean that you will make yourself into a Japanese?"

"Precisely that."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Carter."

"That is twice you have said that. If you keep repeating it, I will begin to believe it."

"Now I think I understand you perfectly. You intend to make me so exactly like the prince that we will be able to entice the conspirators into the belief that I am he, and so induce them to commit some act which will reveal them to you. Then, after that, when that is done, you will lay a trap for them so that they shall abduct me instead of the prince. Is that it?"

"That is it to a dot."

"Very well, I am willing, even if they murder me instead of concealing me somewhere—and murder me they surely will when they discover that they have been fooled."

"My dear general, do you suppose for a moment that I intend to let them carry you off? I have no such idea. I merely intend to fool them. You play your part, and I'll do the rest. And, unless I am greatly mistaken, there will be some great doings before we get through."

CHAPTER II.

PLAYING ONE PRINCE TO SAVE ANOTHER.

"WA-Ash-ing-TON!"

"Here we are," said Nick Carter to his companion, but addressing him in the Japanese language. "And here, general, is where our work begins."

"I only hope that we may be as successful in what is to come, as you have been in creating these wonderful transformations," replied the general. "I would never have believed it possible if I had not been through with the experience myself."

"It is not long ago—only a few hours in fact, when you told me that all things are possible."

"Then I will correct myself and say that I would have regarded this experience as highly improbable."

"That is better."

"Here I am, in face at least, as perfect a counterpart of my prince as if I were his shadow. I look at myself in the mirrors in this car, and find myself on the point of prostrating myself at my own feet, feeling assured that I am looking into the eyes of my prince."

Nick chuckled.

"Then I look at you, and behold! I see actually one of my own countrymen. It is amazing."

They left the train at the Sixth Street station and were driven at once to the quiet hotel which Nick had selected for their stopping place.

He had telegraphed from New York for their accommodations and had signed a name which was well known to the proprietor of the establishment who had often assisted him in his work, and who was in every way thoroughly trustworthy.

From that place, Nick could pass in and out in any disguise he cared to use, without question, it being only necessary for him to stop at the desk and make an agreed-upon sign on a card which he immediately after tore into bits.

This precaution was taken in order that strangers might not pass in in that way some time, for even the proprietor, an ex-detective himself, and for a long time on the secret service, could not hope always to recognize Nick Carter in the many disguises he assumed.

As soon as they arrived and were installed in their rooms, although it was then nearly midnight, Nick called the proprietor to him.

"Thurston," he said, "this gentleman and I are here on a special mission for which we require the utmost secrecy."

"Your missions are all that way, aren't they?" asked Thurston, with a smile.

"Yes; but this one is particularly so. While we are here, I shall pass in and out in various disguises, doubtless, but my friend will use only one."

"Is your friend a Japanese, like yourself?" asked Thurston, with a grin. It was evident to the detective that the proprietor believed his companion to be Chick, his assistant, and he decided to let it go at that.

"Yes," he replied, "he is a Japanese like myself."

"I must say that you both look your parts all right, all right."

"Thank you. Now, Thurston."

"Yes, sir."

"I want the same old attention I have always received from you."

"You shall have it, and more if it is in my power."

"I know that, old chap. Now, about that room at the right-hand side of the entrance, as you come in the door; is it vacant?"

"It will be in thirty minutes, if you want it."

"I do want it for the same purposes as of old." He turned to the general then, and added:

"It is only a quick way of getting out of sight if somebody is following and has gotten a little too close; and there is a way through that room to the back stairs. I say, Thurston, have you seen the Japanese prince since he has been in the city?"

"I could swear that I am looking at him now, if it were not for the limp, and the twist this gentleman seems to have in one of his shoulders."

"You pay a great tribute to my skill, Thurston."

"I know that your skill is all right; as well as I know who this gentleman is, if anybody should ask you."

Nick laughed aloud.

"Oh, you may call him Chick, if you like, when you are alone. He will answer to that name—to you."

"Chick, how are you?" said Thurston, extending his hand to the general; and the general took it and replied:

"Very well, Thurston, thank you. How are you?"

And Thurston wondered why Nick Carter laughed so heartily.

"How long do you expect to be with us, Nick?" asked Thurston.

"I can't say just yet. A week or more, I expect."

"Something doing, eh?"

"Yes; and I may want your help later on."

"You know I am always ready to serve you."

"Sure."

"Is there anything I can send up?"

"Nothing at present, thank you. I am going out presently to take a look at the old city."

"All right. See you later."

Thurston disappeared, and Nick turned to the general.

"How do you like being mistaken for one of my assistants?" he asked.

"It is all the same to me, no matter for what or for whom I am mistaken, so long as we succeed in our task," replied the general.

"We'll succeed. Don't let that worry you for a moment. Now, general, there is your room—it is rather the more comfortable of the two, I imagine, and, as you will be in the house much more than I, it is well that you should take it."

"Thank you."

"I am going out for an hour or two—as soon as I have made myself a trifle more elegant I wish to have myself introduced at a certain place to-night, as one of the prince's suit."

"You are going out as a Japanese?"

"Certainly."

"I wish that I might accompany you."

"Not to-night, general. There is too much at stake for us to take any unnecessary risks."

"True! True!"

"I shall not be more than two or three hours at the most; perhaps not half so long. In the meantime, if you will take my advice you will retire. Our regular work will begin to-morrow."

Nick opened his trunk, which he had found it necessary to bring with him in order to accommodate all the changes he wished to make, and soon arrayed himself in a costume befitting a retainer of the Japanese prince.

Thus attired, he passed out of the house upon the street and thence toward Pennsylvania Avenue and into the New Willard Hotel.

It was midnight, to be sure, but there was a banquet still in progress at the Willard, and the big general room was well filled with people.

Nick knew of this, and he had not the slightest doubt that he would find one of several of the men who would answer his purpose, somewhere about the Willard.

He strolled aimlessly about the great room, apparently devoting his entire attention to admiration of the paintings and decorations of the hotel; presently he sauntered through the social hall which leads to the F Street entrance, peering carelessly into the Palm room and into the great dining room on the opposite side of the hall.

After a little he turned back again, and had almost arrived at the steps where one descends to the office when he found what he was searching for.

A gentleman in evening dress was standing idly at the top of the steps, apparently searching over the heads of the throng in the big room for some acquaintance, and Nick approached and touched him gently on the arm.

He turned quickly, rather surprised that it was one of the Japanese in the city who had accosted him, and inquired politely how he could be of service.

"I know you, sir," replied Nick, in perfect English, to which, however, he imparted just the merest suggestion of a foreign accent. "You were pointed out to me, not long since, as a member of the secret service of this country."

"I'd like to know who——" began the gentleman, but Nick raised one hand deprecatingly, and interrupted him.

"Do not, I pray you, be angry with your friend," he said. "I besought him to do me this favor; and it can do no harm since I will not impart the information to others."

"Are you a member of the prince's suit?" asked the secret service man.

"Certainly. I supposed you were aware of that the moment you saw me."

"Well, I was—after a fashion, although I don't just remember your face."

"No? Perhaps you may not have seen it. I have been much with the prince in his own apartments since our arrival. I was ill on the way across the continent, and he graciously allowed me to escape many of the labors consequent upon attending him."

"Ah! yes. I am glad that you are better. What can I do for you, Mr.——"

"Yamagichi. Pardon me. I had forgotten that you did not know me. You are Mr. Conners, are you not?"

"Yes. In what way can I be of service, Mr. Yamagichi?"

"In a very great way, if you will consent to do it for me?"

"Why, surely, I will be delighted to serve you if it is in my power."

"Oh, it is certainly in your power—that is to say if you are not—what you call addicted to this place for the entire night."

"I shall be off duty shortly after one o'clock."

"Ah! And now it requires only twenty minutes of one. Yes? Well, I can wait."

"But what is it you wish me to do?"

"You will never betray me to any of the members of our suit, of course."

"Certainly not."

"Very well. My friend told me that you were the most loyal man in Washington, and also the best—what did he call it?—posted. That is what my friend and your friend said of you, Mr. Conners."

"I wish you would tell me who he was."

"That would be to break my promise, for I said to him that I would not."

"Oh, well, it's all right, anyhow. Now, what is it you wish me to do for you?"

"There is a gambling house in K Street which I wish to visit after the festivities are over, here—that is, after you can get away. My friend said that you knew about it, and that if I could win your friendship, you would take me there."

"Da—confound him! What business had he to tell you such a thing as that?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Conners. If I have offended you I will withdraw."

"You haven't offended me, but he has."

"You know the house to which I refer?"

"Certainly I know it."

"And you will be so good as to take me there?"

"Look here, Mr. Yamagichi, do you know what sort of a house that is?"

"Yes; it is a gambling house."

"But do you know who runs it?"

"No; I do not know his name, but——"

"It is owned and operated by a Russian, and many of the patrons of the place are Russians at that."

"Yes; I was aware of that fact. That is why I wish to go there."

"The devil it is!"

"Yes. The Russians are gentlemen, are they not? They will not attempt to molest me just because I am a Japanese, will they?"

"No; of course not; but—do you mind telling me just why you wish to go there?"

"Not at all. We have beaten the Russians on the battlefield and on the sea, and I wish to have the personal satisfaction of beating them at the gaming table."

"Well, by thunder!"

"That is the reason. You see I could not go to the war; they would not let me go. I have had no opportunity to fight against a Russian and I will not have one, unless you do me this favor."

"But suppose he should beat you? Suppose he wins and you lose?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders and shook himself in silent laughter.

"Well, then, that is my misfortune; but I do not think it will be so. I have the feeling that I will win."

"They play for very high stakes at that place."

"So much the better."

"You are not afraid of losing a large sum?"

"Not at all."

"And do you understand our money well enough to play it?"

"Certainly. And do you in turn fear that I have not sufficient quantity with me? Look! I will show——"

Nick had already thrust his hand toward his pocket as if to produce his money, when Conners seized his arm.

"For goodness' sake don't be showing your wad here," he said. "Tell me how much you have got with you?"

"I have a hundred thousand of your dollars about my person, besides some change in smaller bills. I am willing to lose that, or to win until they get tired of losing. But the Russian money I will not touch. Whatever I may win shall be yours on the condition that you will give one-half of it to some charity."

"Faith, I'll give it all to charity. I don't want their dough any more than you do."

Conners was getting interested in the scheme. The light of battle gleamed in his eyes.

"Look here," he said, after a moment's pause, "suppose your prince finds out that you have visited a gambling house in the city that is operated by a Russian—what will he say?"

"Shall I tell you what he would say?"

"That is what I asked you to do."

"He would call me to one side and he would whisper close to my ear, 'Go, Yamagichi, find your good friend, Mr. Conners, and tell him that I would be pleased to have him take me to that place also.'"

"The devil he would!"

"That is what he would say to me; but the other members of the suit—no! They must know nothing whatever about it."

"Do you mean to say that your prince would go there to that Russian gambling house with you and me?"

"I mean to say that my prince would be delighted to do so if only he could be assured that the people of the establishment and the frequenters of the place, whom he might meet there, would say nothing about it."

"Oh, I could make him sure enough on that point, all right," said Conners, with conviction.

It was evident from his manner that he spoke the truth, and, moreover, Nick Carter knew that he did so, for he knew Conners from the ground up, as he also knew the gambling house to which he was begging to be taken.

"Does your prince know what sort of a lark you are out on to-night?" asked Conners, who by this time had taken the bait which Nick had prepared for him, hook, line, bob and sinker.

"Ah! My dear Mr. Conners, you must not ask me that—yet. Not until we have seen the place together."

"I see. You are a sort of pilot engine on this route."

"I don't know what it is you call a pilot engine; but, will you take me there when you are through with your work here to-night?"

"I don't know. I haven't exactly made up my mind as yet."

"I'll be patient, then, and wait until you do," said Nick, resignedly.

"You don't want any others of the suit to know about it, eh?"

"Not for the world, Mr. Conners. It need not be known even that you know me at all, if you wish it that way; and then if any questions should ever be asked about the visits there, why there will not be a man in the suit who will know about it, I shall have forgotten—and the prince? Why he would assert that he never heard of the place at all."

"I'm likely to run up against it rather hard in my own department, if it is ever found out that I took one of the prince's suit to that place."

"It will never be found out unless some of your acquaintances at that place tell about it."

"Oh, I can fix that end of it all right."

"Well, then, you will not tell about it yourself, will you?"

"I should say nit!"

"I shall not, most certainly; and the prince—he will not, you may be sure of that."

"Look here, you are not paving the way for taking the prince there to-night, are you?"

"Not at all. Only myself."

"You wish to have a look at the place before you will consent to take him there; eh?"

"Yes; for when I take him there, I will be responsible for him. My head will be the price of his safety."

"You're a queer lot, you Japs."

"And sometimes we think that you are queer lots, only we never venture to say so."

"Yamagichi, I believe you're a good fellow and a good sport."

"You will find that I am—Conners."

"Shake! I like you."

They shook hands as cordially as if they were old friends who had just met.

"Then you will take me there to-night?" asked Nick.

"Yes; I'll do it if I get broke for it."

"I can promise you that you will not get into trouble about it. The prince and your Mr. Wilkie are already very great friends, are they not?"

"I suppose so."

"Then have no fears. Even I, Yamagichi, know how to reach the ear of your Mr. Wilkie, if there should ever be a question about the affair."

"You make me believe in you. We will go."

"And we will leave here at what time?"

"About half-past one."

"Ah! Then we have not long to wait."

"Just half an hour."

"While we are there, perhaps we can arrange for the reception of my prince for some evening later in the week."

"That is just what I was turning over in my mind."

"And we could—or, pardon me, you could arrange with the proprietor so that if there are any persons to whom you might object, for it will all be left to you, they can be detained outside while my prince is playing."

"Exactly."

"The prince would not, however, wish to have the regular patrons excluded from the house on his account, if only they will give their word of honor not to mention the fact that he was seen there."

"Good! That is the way to put it. I can fix all that to a dot."

"And, Mr. Conners?"

"Yes."

"Are there not ladies who go there to gamble, also?"

"Sure there are, but they are ladies! Marakoff permits no scum to float into his place."

"So I have been told."

"Some of the highest in town go there, but rarely so late, unless they are with their husbands and are returning from a ball or something of the kind. In fact, ladies are never allowed there at all unless they are accompanied by their husbands or by some gentleman who is well known to Marakoff."

"Marakoff is, I suppose, the name of the gentleman who operates the place."

"Yes—and he has made a mint of money there, too; and I think I can see him fingering some of yours between now and sunrise."

"Ha! Do you? We shall see. I will meet you at this spot at half-past one, and I will have a carriage in readiness."

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL WITH THE RUSSIANS.

Nick Carter's idea had thus far worked even better than he could have expected.

Of all the men connected with the secret service, Conners was the one he would have chosen, and to find him so ready at hand was indeed fortunate.

It had been his idea at first to announce who he was and what the game was that he intended to play, and he had not changed that idea until the instant when he touched Conners on the arm and confronted him.

Nick had no fear that Conners nor anybody else would recognize him, and he decided on the spur of the moment that it would be better to let the thing go along as it was until the right moment came to reveal the truth; moreover, he hugely enjoyed the fun of it.

It was two o'clock when they arrived at the gambling house, which outwardly bears the appearance of an old-time Washington mansion.

There is nothing whatever about it to indicate what it really is, and with the exception of the initiated, there are few Washingtonians who are aware of its existence.

When one rides on top of one of the "Seeing Washington" busses, the building is pointed out as having at one time been the home of a statesman of considerable note; it is never announced through the megaphone that it is at present used as a gambling house.

When Conners and Nick entered the vestibule and closed the door behind them, the negro who replied to the signal by glancing at them through the wicket, looked askance upon the features of the detective in whom he saw, as Conners did, only a Jap.

But Conners stepped forward quickly, and said:

"It's all right, Pete. You know me."

When the door was opened, still in some trepidation on the part of Pete, Conners added:

"We will go into the reception room, and you find Marakoff and bring him down. Tell him I am here and wish to see him. Skip, now."

Pete disappeared, and Conners turned to Nick.

"If you should come here alone and search for a bell to ring, you would find one only on the outside of the outer door," he said, not dreaming that the man before him knew as much about it as he did, "and if you should ring that bell, you would never gain admittance here in a thousand years."

"Why not?" asked Nick, ingenuously.

"They would know you were not 'on.' You would be told that there was nobody at home, and you would have to go away again."

"Then how do you announce your coming? I saw you give no signal."

"I gave one all the same."

"But how?"

"Simply by stepping inside the vestibule and closing the outer door. The act of closing that door rings a bell inside which Pete answers by looking through the wicket."

"It is very ingenious."

"A card won't admit you, either. You have to be presented."

"A very excellent way to avoid mistakes."

"Bet your life it is. This is the best and the simplest-guarded gambling joint in the United States. Ah! Here is Marakoff. Good-evening, colonel. I wish to present you to my friend, Mr. Yamagichi, of the suit of Prince——"

"Pray mention no names save yours and my own, Mr. Conners. It is sufficient to say the prince, is it not?" interrupted Nick; and then without awaiting a reply, he turned and bowed profoundly to Marakoff, and added:

"I consider it an honor to know Col. Marakoff; and, sir, if you will do me the honor to permit me the courtesies of your house, I think there need be nothing but amity between us, even though our nations are at war. We need not shake hands and we need not necessarily eat and drink together, and I am sure we need not be enemies."

Marakoff had been scowling darkly when the introduction was made, but now he was smiling.

"You are quite welcome, if you care to play, so long as you are introduced here by Mr. Conners, and —you come with a flag of truce."

"Ah! no. Not with a flag of truce, but to make war. To make war upon your tables, not yourself, however."

"Then you are thrice welcome. But, tell me, how shall I present you to my friends in the gaming rooms?"

"As a member of the prince's suit, if you will, but not by name, if you please."

"Very good, sir. Will you follow me, gentlemen?"

He turned and led the way up a broad flight of stairs. A negro relieved them of their hats and top coats, and in a moment more they were ushered into the great room on the second floor which extends the entire length of the mansion.

It was evident that a whisper had gone about that a Jap was coming, for, as they entered, every eye in the room was turned upon them, and many rose from the tables expectantly. In all there were not more than a score of persons present, and Nick noticed with satisfaction that three of them were women, and he felt almost sure that these were the women who were concerned in the conspiracy.

He knew Marakoff; he knew the man to be an intriguer, and he had been sure that it would be to him that the six conspirators would apply for information, and perhaps assistance.

"Gentlemen—and ladies," said Marakoff, bowing, "permit me to present to you a member of the suit of a certain prince who is now visiting Washington. He comes in peace and with a very good friend of mine, Mr. Conners, whom you all know."

They all bowed silently. No one uttered a word.

It was Nick who relieved the awkwardness.

"I trust that you will receive me in the spirit in which I come," he said, smiling upon them. "The war is in Manchuria and at Port Arthur, not here, although I hope there are some of you who are willing to play against me."

Several of the gentlemen stepped forward and bowed, muttering some sort of welcome. Not one of them extended his hand. The ladies bowed too graciously, Nick thought.

There were five men who cashed in and left the room and the house.

One big Russian asked, gruffly:

"Have you no name, my enemy?"

"Ah! yes," replied Nick, laughing. "You may call me Yamagichi, if it pleases you to utter a Japanese name."

"You are in a merry mood."

"Surely; and why not? I am in a mood for play."

"And what will you have?"—it was still the man with the gruff voice who spoke—"there is faro, rouge et noir, hazard, roulette, baccarat, even craps. Which will you have?"

"Whichever pleases you the best; but is there not also poker?"

"Certainly. Do you prefer that game?"

"Oh, no. I was only astonished that you omitted it. I prefer them all."

"You have your choice; take it, and I will be your first opponent."

"Suppose we try one after another until we have tried them all, and that I have a different opponent in each. Would that not be better?"

"Infinitely better if you think you can last so long."

"Thank you," said Nick, laughing again. Then he turned toward the ladies, and added:

"And afterward, shall I have the pleasure of trying my luck against the ladies?"

"By all means, Mr. Yamagichi," replied one of them; "but ladies are not usually left to the last."

"Ah! but this is an occasion where the last shall be first—in the esteem of your opponent."

Many of them had by this time returned to their respective games, and now, all save the man with the gruff voice forgot the Japanese in the ecstasy of gambling—that is, all save the three women who swept furtive glances in his direction.

And after a moment Nick could see that they had ceased to play and were engaged in an animated conversation together at the far end of the room.

"Now, sir, what game will you play?" demanded he of the gruff voice.

"Shall it be faro?" replied Nick, with an interrogative.

"Very good. Let it be faro."

"I suggest, then," continued Nick, "that we play through two deals only, and that during the first deal, you play only against me, and only such cards as I play. If you copper a card, I play it to win; if I play to win, you copper. For the second deal, no matter how the first shall end, I play against you under the same arrangement. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly."

"Then if Mr. Marakoff will supply us with a table, we will begin at once."

"What will be your stakes?"

"Ah! I will ask you to fix that, for both deals, if you will be so kind—and I suppose, of course, it would depend upon the limit of the house, only that on this occasion the bank cannot lose, since it merely pays me the bets you lose, or vice versa."

"Make your own arrangements, gentlemen," said Marakoff, well pleased with the arrangement.

"Shall we each take ten thousand dollars' worth of chips?" asked the Russian.

"That is satisfactory to me."

"Ten thousand, then, on each deal."

"Ten thousand on each deal be it."

"Who shall deal for us?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Why not Mr.—pardon me—Col. Marakoff himself?" he asked; "that is, of course, if he is willing."

Nick knew Marakoff and all his arts. He had watched

his deals many times and watched them with great care, and he knew that there was not a trick which Marakoff could perform on him at this short notice, which he would not recognize and defeat.

Marakoff consented.

He took his seat behind the table and shuffled the cards deliberately, while Nick and his opponent purchased their chips—one hundred chips each, at one hundred dollars per chip.

By this time the interest in the other games in the room had lagged, and now, as if by common consent, every patron there arose from his table and came forward to where the faro duel was to be enacted.

It is doubtful if a scene such as this was ever before witnessed in a gambling room, and if it is possible for the reader to realize the emotions of those Russians into whose club—if it might be called such—a single Jap had penetrated, he will understand something of the feeling of repressed excitement that was in the air.

Marakoff placed the cards in the box and showed a king, and Nick, with a smile, turned to his opponent.

"I think it is best to have it over with as little ceremony as possible," he said, "and since there is a king on top, and I am somewhat superstitious about the future of kings in general, I will play the entire ten thousand dollars on the czar—I beg your pardon—the king, to lose. You, of course, play a like sum on him to win."

The entire company stood aghast at the proposition.

Nick's opponent scowled more fiercely than ever and stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Certainly," he said. "I play ten thousand for the king to win."

Marakoff ran the cards off rapidly, and as card after card appeared and no king showed, the excitement around the table became intense.

At last, however, the tension was relieved.

The king showed—and lost!

"Thank you," said Nick, still smiling. Then he turned to Conners.

"Mr. Conners," he said, "will you be so kind as to take charge of that ten thousand dollars for me?"

The money was handed out and Conners placed it in his pocket, while Marakoff scowlingly shuffled the cards for the second deal.

When he placed them in the box, it was a king which showed again, and Nick stood back from the table waiting patiently for his opponent to make his play.

"I shall make a different play than yours, my enemy," he said, facetiously. "You were, I think, altogether too brave."

"I'll play a hundred dollars at a time if you wish. You have the control this deal, you know."

"Ready, gentlemen?" asked the dealer.

"Run off a few cards first," replied the Russian.

Marakoff did as requested, pausing for a moment each time to await a possible play from the Russian.

At last he lifted one hand to ask for time, and then with a wave of his hand over his head, which comprehended a genuine flourish, he remarked:

"That jack has something of the appearance of a Japanese. I think I will play five thousand on him to lose, and five thousand again on the king to win."

Nick immediately made the two bets against him, and then the deal went on as before.

Presently, after a moment of intense interest, the king won.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Russian, "I have you there."

"You have," replied Nick, still smiling.

But at the very next turn of the cards, the jack won.

"It is a stand-off, gentlemen," said Marakoff. "You come out even on this deal. Will you have another?"

"By no means," replied Nick. "I am the winner on the two deals, and our agreement was to play only two. It seems that I am ten thousand dollars to the good."

"Yes; but by a mere fluke," said the Russian.

Nick laughed pleasantly.

"Call it what you please," he said, "I am still the winner. "Now, who is the next gentleman who would like to oppose me?"

"I will be glad to try you, sir," said a second Russian, stepping forward.

"Very good, sir. What will be your choice of game?" replied Nick.

"I will take the bank against you in a game of baccarat."

"And for what amount?"

"The same as you have already played—ten thousand."

"At your service, sir."

They stepped to a round, green-covered table, a new pack of cards was brought, and the opponents took their seats.

The first card dealt to Nick was a three spot, and he placed two thousand five hundred upon it. The dealer's card was a five, and he put down five thousand dollars to represent his belief that he would get nearer to seven than Nick.

But Nick, without the wink of an eyelash placed another two thousand five hundred on his own side of the table and the cards were thrown again.

Nick drew another three spot, and the dealer drew a deuce.

The Russian, without a word, calmly drew Nick's money to his side of the table and began to shuffle the cards anew.

This time, when the cards were thrown out, Nick received a five spot and put the entire ten thousand dollars upon it.

"It is better to have it over with as little delay as possible," he remarked; "that is if you happen to receive a card which you consider worth your while."

The dealer also drew a five, and without an instant of hesitation, and as silently as before, he placed his money down.

"Good!" said Nick. "Throw the cards.

They were thrown, and the spectators started back with a gasp.

Nick Carter had drawn a deuce and the dealer an ace. Nick had won.

"Mr. Conners," he said, calmly rising from the table, "will you be kind enough to take charge of that money for me, also?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Conners.

"I thank you, sir," said Nick, bowing to his opponent. "It is the fortune of war; no?"

There was not a word spoken in the room for the space of an entire minute, and then Nick broke the silence.

"Who is the next gentleman?" he asked, with the habitual smile he had assumed with the character he represented.

"I, sir," replied a deep voice in the background, and a gentleman, whom Nick had not noticed before, and whom he therefore believed had just come in, stepped forward.

"At your service, sir," responded Nick. "What will be the game?"

"Let it be baccarat again, if it pleases you."

"I am in the hands of my enemies," replied Nick, laughing. "You have the selection of the games; but I must warn you that I am proverbially lucky."

"It appears so. You are already fifteen thousand dollars winner."

"Exactly," said Nick.

"Who will deal?"

"Shall we cut for it?" asked Nick. "I am aware that such is not the usual custom in baccarat, but it would seem a pleasant way to settle the point."

"Very good, sir; we will cut for it."

A new pack of cards was brought to them. They were shuffled by Marakoff and placed on the table.

"In cutting for the deal in baccarat, gentlemen," said the proprietor, "the nearest to the seven wins the deal."

"Will you cut first, sir?" asked Nick, bowing across the table to his opponent.

[illegible] and cut, and he turned up a six.

[illegible] direction the sympathies tended; but when Nick raised his card it was turned into a groan, for he had cut a seven.

"You win the deal," said the Russian, calmly.

"So I perceive," replied Nick. "And now, if you will permit me, I will create an innovation—perhaps it is a precedent. I will ask one of these ladies to deal for us—that is, she deals for me. Is that agreeable?"

"Perfectly."

Nick knew that with the luck he had shown already, if he should win on his own deal, they would be likely to accuse him of juggling with the cards, and he wished to avoid such an incident.

The three women were ardent spectators of the scene, and Nick turned to them with his imported smile.

"Which of you will oblige me?" he asked.

They were all silent, and after a moment Nick fixed his eyes upon one of them—the one he had noticed as being apparently the leader of the group—and said to her:

"Will you oblige me, madam?"

She stepped forward at once.

"Certainly," she replied.

"You understand baccarat?"

"Perfectly."

"Then do me the favor to take the chair. I will stand here beside you."

She shuffled the cards with considerable skill, and Nick watched her carefully; but he was immediately convinced that she did not know how to juggle with them, or that if she did, she did not dare to do so while he stood so near to her.

The card thrown to the Russian across the table was a deuce.

"Pass," he said.

The card thrown to Nick was a three spot.

Nick placed five thousand upon it.

The next card to the Russian was another deuce, and he also put down five thousand.

Nick now drew an ace, which made his count four—that is his count and that of his opponent where the same.

Nevertheless, he calmly placed the balance of his money on the table.

"We are even so far," he said, "and again I will play my luck against yours. Deal to the gentleman, if you please, madame."

The card was thrown to him and proved to be an ace, making him five, but Nick's card was a deuce, and he was six.

"Madame," he said to the dealer, with a bow, "you have done me a very great favor, and I thank you; and now, if you will accept the winnings of this game I will be under still greater obligation."

She turned a shade paler, and glanced in trepidation

toward her companions in the room; Marakoff relieved the situation.

"Accept it by all means, Madame Turvanieff," he said. "The offer is made in good faith, I am sure;" and with a smile she swept the money into her lap.

CHAPTER IV.

SETTING A SPLENDID TRAP.

"Gentlemen," said Nick, turning and facing the scowling Russians who felt that they had been thoroughly whipped in their own stronghold, and who resented that fact much more than they did the loss of the money, "I am now twenty-five thousand dollars winner in this little duel at cards. It ill becomes me to challenge any of you to another game, but if there is one here who desires a game, I am ready; and I call you all to witness that I have not played your own money against you once, and will not. Mr. Conners has my winnings, as you all know, and Madame Turvanieff has kindly consented to accept the proceeds of the last game."

For a moment after that there was dead silence in the room.

Much as they loved their country, they were gamblers, and, therefore, superstitious, and not one of them cared to risk their money against his phenomenal luck.

And then it was Madame Turvanieff who stepped forward.

"I have a proposition to make," she said.

"Make it, madame; I am profoundly interested," replied Nick.

"I have here the ten thousand dollars which you so generously presented to me."

"Yes."

"I propose that I play that ten thousand dollars, which is really yours, against you."

"Pardon me, the money is yours, madame."

"I propose that I play it against you."

"That is entirely acceptable to me."

"You will do it?"

"With pleasure."

"Have you any choice of game?"

"Not when I am to have such a charming opponent."

"Then let us return to the faro table."

"Very good."

"And you are to play against me; but there is to be only one game, and that is to be the last of the evening—or of the night. Is that agreed?"

"You are the arbiter, madame."

"Then come."

They returned again to the faro table where Nick had played against the men with the gruff voice, and, as before, Marakoff was asked to deal.

"I would much rather that one of my dealers should take the place," he said; but Madame Turvanieff was insistent, and he finally took his seat behind the table.

"Will you have the money in chips, or in markers?" he asked of the woman.

"In chips, if you please," she replied. "I have a system at the game which I wish to try against this gentleman's luck."

"There is only one system, madame, which was ever known to work," said Nick, smiling, "and that, I believe, is the solar system."

She smiled back at him bewitchingly, for she was a surprisingly beautiful woman, and then turned to the table as Marakoff placed the box upon it.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I am in luck so far, for it is a queen which shows."

"And a queen who plays, madame. Of the two, it is the queen who plays who should conquer, so I should advise you to play that one in the box to lose."

"Never," she replied. "Queens always win for me. If you will wait, Col. Marakoff, I wish to put down ten bets before the beginning of the deal."

She divided her chips into piles of one thousand dollars each, making ten; and she placed them, one on the queen, one on the ace, coppered; one behind the five, one on the seven, coppered; one behind the jack—and stopped.

"There are five bets. I will stop at that for the present," she said.

Nick immediately placed his markers against her bets and the deal began.

At the second turn of the cards the queen lost, and Nick had won the first thousand dollars.

"You see, madame," he said, turning to her, "if you had taken my advice about the queen, you would have won that first bet. You should have more faith in yourself and less in other queens."

"I have faith in my system," she replied, not as pleasantly as she had spoken before, for the fever of gambling was upon her, and she thought much more of winning against this remarkable man than she did of the money that was involved.

"Wait," she exclaimed, peremptorily to the dealer. "I will put five thousand dollars this time on the high card to win."

"And I copper it," said Nick.

"Jack loses and ace wins," called out Marakoff.

"You see, madame," said Nick, "you lost six thousand dollars by that turn of the cards. You have now three bets left on the table; do you desire to change them?"

"No," she replied, petulantly. "Let them stand as they are. But wait! I will place them all on the high card. We might as well have this thing over with at once."

"The three thousand goes on the high card?" asked Marakoff.

"Yes," she replied.

He turned the cards.

"The king loses and the five wins," he said, monotonously.

Madame Turvanieff turned like a flash to Nick.

"You win again," she said. "Tell me, are you a devil?"

"Hardly that, madame; I am merely lucky; and if you will still retain the stakes you accepted and played with against me here, I shall esteem it a favor."

"No, sir, I cannot do that—now."

"Very well, as you will. Mr. Conners, will you do me the favor to take charge of them?"

Conners accepted the money gracefully, and then Nick turned and bowed to all present.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I feel that I am greatly indebted to you for the enjoyment you have given me, and I hope that none of you has any other than a friendly feeling toward me personally. And now, may I say something which will astonish you?"

"Say on," said Marakoff. "My friends here are all good losers, and they are all aware that it is nothing but your phenomenal luck which has defeated them. What is it you would say?"

"Merely that my prince has expressed a desire to come here and play, as I have done."

When Nick made the remark he turned his eyes quickly in the direction of the three women who were again standing in a group, and he saw them exchange rapid glances of seeming exultation.

He was sure now that he was on the right track. He was positive in his own mind that these were the three women who had been sent out of Russia for the purpose of abducting the prince, and he was equally sure that he had selected the three men who accompanied them.

One was, he thought, the man with the gruff voice who had played with him first; another, the man who had proposed baccarat, and the third, one who had stood closely aside during the entire play, taking no part whatever in it.

There was a flutter of excitement when he announced that his prince desired to come to that place, and for a moment they all seemed to be stupefied by the statement.

It was Marakoff who broke the silence.

"Your prince likes to play, eh?" he asked.

"He does indeed."

"And like you, he wishes to have a play against Russians?"

"Well, yes. But I think his chief desire in coming here, is to ascertain if the Russians would treat him courteously. I have assured him that he would be treated with the utmost consideration; he merely wishes to prove it."

"Then he shall come; eh, Marakoff?" exclaimed the man of the baccarat table.

"Assuredly," replied Marakoff.

"I think I may state to you, gentlemen," said Nick, "that my prince is not a very good gambler. He loses often, I am told."

"And when would you like to bring him?"

"To-morrow night—or, rather, since it is now morning, this very night."

"At what time?"

"At about the time I came—say at two."

"What do you say, ladies and gentlemen," asked he of the gruff voice. "Shall we have a party, consisting of those present and none other—Marakoff will see to that—to receive the prince to-morrow night?"

"Ay," they chorused, as with one voice.

"My prince," said Nick, "would wish to pledge you all to secrecy concerning his coming and going. No one of our suit, save the prince and myself, shall know where we are going, or, in fact, that we go out at all, for it shall be done secretly. That is one favor he requests of you."

Again Nick saw the rapid exchange of glances between the women; and then the gruff voice broke in:

"We will give our pledge, will me not?"

"Ay," they replied again.

"Then," said Nick, "it is understood. "At two o'clock in the night that is coming, I bring the prince here with me."

"Yes," said Marakoff, "and we will treat him with the same courtesy and respect that he would receive in his own country."

"Ah! no," said Nick. "Not that, if you please. He desires to be received exactly as you have received me. You may call him prince, if it pleases you, but exactly as if that were a given name instead of a title."

"Agreed!" cried the gruff voice.

"Will Mr. Conners accompany you?" asked the insinuating voice of Madame Turvanieff.

"I am very sorry," said Conners, "but the fact is I will be on duty elsewhere at that time, but if Mr. Yamagichi desires, I can provide him with an escort."

"No, indeed!" said Nick, quickly. "What need is there of an escort? My prince and I will come here quietly at the time appointed. We will be received at the door by Col. Marakoff, and when we are through with the play, we will go as we came and nobody will be the wiser."

"Excellent!" said he of the baccarat.

"Then I think it is all arranged, and with your permission I will say good-evening."

Five minutes later Nick and Conners were in their carriage again.

"Now, Mr. Conners," said Nick, "I wish you to make one more call with me."

"Where, for Heaven's sake, at this hour?"

"At a little hotel not far away. You will know the place when we arrive;" and he thrust his head out of the window and spoke to the driver.

"Ah! yes," said Conners, when the carriage came to a halt. "But what do you wish of me in there?"

"Come, and I will show you," replied Nick.

Conners followed obediently. He remembered that he had twenty-five thousand dollars of the money his companion had won, in his pockets, and he began to think that this call had some reference to that.

Nick led him through the room at the right of the entrance and thence around by the back stairs to his own room, while Conners was with each moment more puzzled than ever.

When they entered, the door between that room and the one occupied by the general was open, and Nick stepped hastily toward it.

"Are you there, my prince?" he asked.

"Yes," came a sleepy reply.

"If you will dress, my prince, in your princely robes, I wish you would be prepared to come when I call you."

"I will be ready," came the reply.

Nick closed the door and turned toward Conners.

"My God!" said Conners. "Do you mean to say that the prince is in there?"

"The prince is in there, as you shall see in a moment."

"What the devil are you, anyhow?"

"Nick Carter, at your service," replied Nick, in his natural tones, and with a laugh.

Conners was simply speechless with amazement; but when at last he found his voice, he demanded:

"What devil's trick is this, anyhow, Nick, for I know you have?"

"Wait a moment until my prince appears, and then we will enlighten you."

They had only a moment more to wait, for Nick had stepped to the door and asked the general to come as soon as he was ready.

When he did appear, Conners started back in utter astonishment, and then bowed profoundly.

"I thought you were joking, Carter," he said. "I had no idea that the prince was really here."

"He is not here, Conners. Permit me to present you to Gen. Yagarosi, of the First Japanese Army."

"General Yag-ar-osi? I could swear he is the prince."

"So much the better. General, this is Mr. Conners, of our secret service, one of my truest friends, who will forgive me for the trick I have played upon him, I know."

"Sure," said Conners. "That goes without saying."

"Mr. Conners has twenty-five thousand dollars in his pocket which I won at play to-night, from the Russians," continued Nick.

"Yes, and he won ten more which he gave back; more's the pity," said Conners.

"Now, Conners, if you will give me your attention for a moment I will tell you what the real game is," continued Nick.

"Sure, I'm all attention, for Heaven knows that I was never so puzzled in my life. Carter, you're a crack-a-jack."

"Thank you. Now, Conners, there is a conspiracy on foot to abduct the prince. What the object or the purpose is I do not know; but the conspiracy does exist."

"What! Do they think they could take him out of Washington from under our very noses?"

"That is evidently what they think."

"Who are 'they'?"

"Three men and three women, sent here from Russia. They were all at Marakoff's to-night."

"The devil they were!"

"Yes; the three women, the man with the gruff voice, who played faro with me, the man who lost at baccarat, and the silent man who had nothing to say. I spotted them all."

"Are you sure about this?"

"As sure as that I am seated here in your presence now."

Suddenly Conners leaped to his feet.

"I see the game now!" he cried. "The general brought you the news of the conspiracy; you made him up to resemble the prince—and by the powers you have done it all right."

"Yes, I think I have."

"And now you propose to give them a chance to abduct him, and you want us to be on hand to rescue him; eh?"

"That is about it."

"By Jove, but it is a beautiful scheme. Now go ahead. Tell me what you want me to do."

"I want you, first, to divide that twenty-five thousand dollars as you see fit among the men you select with Mr. Wilkie's permission, to help you to-morrow night—or let us say to-night."

"Well, there'll be no trouble about that."

"I want you to go to the chief and tell him the whole story from beginning to end. Inform him that it is the mikado's especial commands upon the general, that the prince himself is never to discover that such a conspiracy existed at all, and that so far as possible, the information shall be kept from all others as well."

"I see. Go on."

"The, or rather my, prince and I will be abducted together from that gambling house, and we won't fight very hard to prevent it. We will pretend to be frightened, for I want them to take us and to convey us to whatever place they have in readiness for the reception of the prince."

"I see. It's a good idea. You want to know if there is a nest of them there. Well, so do we. It's a good plan. Go on."

"It will be well for you to have good men, for there is no knowing what you may run up against."

"I know what they will run up against before they get through with this deal. I like their cheek, thinking they can do that sort of thing in the face of our whole department. I know what they'll be up against, all right!"

"They evidently have their preparations all made. They evidently think that the game is playing into their hands beautifully, and they think now that they have got the prince already in their clutches."

"Sure thing!"

"My arrangement is for us to go there secretly, with not a soul save yourself to know about it—and that reminds me. Conners, you want to be very careful to-day."

"Why so?"

"Something may fall on you. You know too much. You are the only person who will know to what place the prince went, when he disappears, as they think he will do. They will try to put you out of the way."

"Let them. I'll meet them halfway."

"Nevertheless, be on your guard."

"You bet."

"To return, the arrangements I made to-night for the visit of the prince seemed to them like a godsend, and I'll wager that they are at this moment making merry over the affair and laughing in their sleeves to think how easily they have caught us."

"By the powers, I'll root out old Marakoff's place for this thing."

"That as you please. The whole idea is that it must never be known outside of ourselves."

"But what will we do with the gang we capture, for we'll capture every one of them."

"Lock them up, and then report the entire affair to Secretary Hay. He will tell you what to do."

"By Jove, that's right!"

"And that is the only way to handle it. It is a matter which comes directly under the authority of his department, for if it were to get out in a wrong way, it might result in serious complications."

"You're right it might."

"The first thing for you to do is to go to your chief."

"Sure."

"I think he will let you handle it, or he may take command of the affair in person. In any case, I want you to be there in person if you can, for you know the faces of those who were in the gambling house with us, and that is a knowledge which may prove valuable."

"That's right."

"Tell the chief about the money, and hand it over to him. Tell him that I would like him to divide it among his men as he thinks best, or to dispose of it as he sees fit. The whole thing about it is that I don't want it."

"There aren't many like you, Carter."

"Oh, yes, there are; lots."

"How do you think we ought to go about the capture, after the abduction takes place?"

"My idea is for six of you to be in a carriage. Get one which looks like a private equipage. Two of you can be coachman and footman, and the other four can be inside."

"Good!"

"Then, whatever other men you have—and I think you had better have enough——"

"You bet we will."

"Have them disposed so they can follow your carriage, and be on hand when they are wanted."

"I can do that, too."

"I have an idea that the abductors will take to the river."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I should not wonder if there is a swift yacht lying in the river somewhere, and that it is their intention to take the prince aboard of that, and take him down the river to some point where they would have put him aboard of a seagoing vessel."

"It's as sure as you're alive. It's the only way in which they could get out of the city."

"Well, that's the whole story. You know it now."

"I know it like a book."

CHAPTER V.

THE REAL PRINCE APPEARS.

Nick Carter did not retire to rest as most men would have done under the circumstances, after the arduous day and night he had put in; instead, he seated himself, lighted a cigar and gave the now thoroughly aroused general a succinct account of the events of the evening.

"It is wonderful," said the general, "how you could have found them so quickly. When I talked with you in your room yesterday afternoon, you seemed to think that it was next to impossible to discover the identities of these people; and now—poosh!—you know all about them."

"I happened to remember that Russian gambling house," said Nick, "and it occurred to me that it was the most likely place in Washington for me to find them."

"Yes; but to go there as a Japanese. That was a brave thing to do."

"It was upon that very thing that I relied to indicate to me the people for whom I was searching."

"How so?"

"Why, the moment it was announced that I was a mem-

ber of the prince's suit, I knew that if any of the persons interested in the conspiracy were there, they would at once manifest the fact in some way, and I knew that I would discover it—as I did."

"It is remarkable all the same. And now, Mr. Carter, what do we do next?"

"We await developments."

"That is, we await this evening, when we go to the house to be abducted. Is that it?"

"Well, something very like it. But, in the meantime, you have never before been in Washington, have you?"

"Never."

"Then I suggest that we have our breakfast and I then take you to see some of the sights of the city."

"Ah! if I could only see the prince without his seeing me."

"You shall," said Nick.

"Shall? Shall? How?"

"Why, I will change the appearance of your face by the addition of a bunch of whiskers, such as some of your countrymen wear, and then we will go out together."

"But the prince—the prince!"

"The prince is sight-seeing. I think there will be no difficulty in finding out where he is going and what he intends to do to-day. Perhaps we can pay our respects to him."

"No, no; I would not dare that. I do not wish to do that."

"Very well, we can look at him, at least."

"Yes; we can do that."

"Only there is one thing, general, I must keep on these togs—clothes. I cannot appear as your servant."

"I would prefer you not to do so."

"You see it is more than likely that I might encounter some one or more of the party I met at the gambling house, and if I appeared in the capacity of your servant, they would get suspicious."

"Assuredly they would do so."

"So I will treat you as an honored guest. Come; are you ready for breakfast?"

"Quite so; quite so."

An hour later they were on the street together, and presently found themselves strolling down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the capitol.

It was still early in the day—shortly after nine o'clock in fact, and there is never much doing in Washington at that hour in the morning, save by sight-seers; but they are always about.

They walked the entire distance to the capitol and went inside that magnificent structure.

The process of viewing it from end to end occupied the general so absolutely that he was not aware of the flight of time until he looked at his watch and found that it was almost noon.

"When do we see the prince?" he asked of Nick.

"In about fifteen minutes, general."

"And how do you know that?"

"Because the morning paper told me that he would be at the capitol at noon. He will enter at the east front, so we are at this moment in a fairly good position to get a view of him when he arrives."

"Ah! That is——"

"Hush!" said Nick, sharply, and in a low tone. "Let us talk Japanese now, and I wish you to pretend that you do not understand English."

"Why? What is the matter?"

"I see two of the people I met last night in the gambling house. They are approaching us. Ah! They have already seen me;" and the detective raised his hat and bowed.

"It is the chap with the gruff voice, and Madame Turvanieff," he murmured in the general's ear.

They had indeed discovered Nick, and they came toward him rapidly, the woman with a beaming smile, and with her hand outstretched.

Nick accepted the hand and bent over it for an instant; then he bowed to her companion.

"So," said Madame Turvanieff, "you are not on duty to-day?"

"No; I have a dear friend who is also traveling in this country whom I met by accident this morning, and I craved permission to accompany him, as he speaks no English. May I present him?"

"Certainly; but if he speaks neither English nor Russian we will be in a sorry plight."

"Madame Turvanieff, my friend Count Ichito," said Nick; and then turning to the general, he said rapidly in Japanese—for he was more or less certain that the madame understood it: "Count, I wish to present to friends of mine, Madame Turvanieff and monsieur, her husband."

He had no idea whether he was right or wrong in that statement, but they both accepted it without the quiver of an eyelid, and both accepted the introducion.

To Nick's surprise the man with the gruff voice at once addressed the general in Japanese, which he seemed to speak quite fluently, and Nick, perceiving that they were getting on amicably, turned to the woman again.

"You are not to fail us at our party to-night?" she asked.

"By no means."

"Have you spoken to your prince about it?"

"I have told him everything that occurred. He commended me for one thing."

"What was that?"

"That I permitted myself to win from you at that last game of faro."

"Ah! But you could not help winning. It was your luck. Where did you get such wonderful luck?"

"I have always been lucky. I was born so."

"Indeed. Ah! well, I wish I had some of it. You have told the prince of the arrangement for to-night?"

"Certainly."

"And he approves?"

"Did I not tell you that he sent me there to make the arrangement for him to go?"

"So you did. Marakoff has assured us that no person, who was not there last night, shall be permitted to remain after half-past one to-night, so the prince can be assured that none but those who gave their word about secrecy will be present."

"He is already assured of that, madame."

"Your friend, Mr. Conners, is, I understand, in the secret service."

"Ah! He would not like you to know that. Marakoff should not have told you."

The woman bit her lip and frowned. She saw that she had made a mistake.

"The prince is coming," she said; and indeed he was.

His party was driven to the front of the capitol steps, where they alighted and were ushered into the capitol.

Fortune favored Nick again in this instance.

As the prince was passing where he and the general were standing with their companions, his eyes lighted upon his countryman, as he supposed them to be, and he bowed and smiled toward them, exactly as if there was a personal acquaintance.

The general bowed profoundly, and Nick also, and the cortege—if it might be so called—passed on.

Madame Turvanieff turned her eyes again to Nick. If she had had any doubts before, they were utterly dispelled now.

"I wonder if he will remember me when he sees me to-night," she said, smiling.

"He cannot fail to do so, madame; to see you once is to remember you always."

"You are a wonder, Mr. Yamagichi," she said.

"Why so?"

"You speak English like an American; you pay compliments like a Frenchman—and you gamble as if you were the devil himself."

"You might have added that I can make love like a Russian—if I have the chance."

She laughed aloud at that, and turned to her husband.

"Come," she said, in Russian. "We must be going."

As they turned away, they encountered Conners, who was on duty as one of the guards for the prince, and madame was about to stop and speak to him, when he saluted her coldly and turned away.

Nick saw that she bit her lips again, and that a little wicked gleam came into her eyes.

"I think, general," he said, in a low tone, "that Conners is in great danger of meeting with an accident between now and midnight. But I have warned him. He should be on his guard."

"Yes; if he does not hold them in too much contempt," replied the general. "That is a bad woman, Mr.—Yamagichi. I almost said the wrong name," he whispered.

They left the capitol then, took a carriage and were driven to the Willard, where Nick wished to look around a little; and from there, they presently walked to the White House.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ASSASSIN IN THE PARK.

Shortly after five o'clock that afternoon Nick was walking alone across Lafayette Square toward the Arlington Hotel, when he saw Conners coming toward him.

Acting upon an impulse which he could not have explained if he had tried, the detective turned aside, hunched up his shoulders and otherwise disfigured himself in such a manner that if Conners happened to look in his direction, he would not recognize him.

And Conners was evidently absorbed in thought, for he did not glance in either direction, but walked straight on, rapidly toward the White House.

It was almost dark, for the season was late in the fall.

Lafayette Square is filled with trees and is a gloomy place after nightfall, and Nick, still acting upon the same impulse, turned and followed after Conners, although at a considerable distance.

Conners had almost reached Pennsylvania Avenue, when Nick saw a figure dart out from among the trees, and rush after him with uplifted hand in which, even in that half light, gleamed the unmistakable glint of a dagger or a knife.

Nick was too far away to be able to overtake the man before he should reach Conners, and he knew that unless the would-be assassin was stopped, murder would be done.

With that wonderful quickness and precision for which the detective is famed, he threw one of those remarkable weapons he always carries in his sleeve, into his hand and fired.

It was a snap shot in the half dark, and there were eddying shadows around to distract his aim if such a thing had been possible; but the bullet went true for all that.

The man fired upon uttered a scream, and, half turning, fell to the ground; but he was upon his feet in an instant, and was starting away, when Conners, who had turned like lightning at the report of the weapon, leaped upon him and pinned him to the ground.

In the meantime, Nick joined them.

"Well, Conners," he said, "I told you so."

The man on the ground was still struggling, for he had sustained no worse a wound than a bullet through the hand which had held the knife, but Conners quickly choked him into submission, and then turning, said:

"Thanks, old chap. I reckon he'd have done for me if you had not been there."

"Were you dreaming, Conners?" asked Nick.

"Yes; about to-night."

"Didn't you think they would try to do you before the affair came off?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I didn't give it much thought."

"You'd better do so. I have an idea that this is not the only fellow they have put on your track."

"Probably not; but they won't catch me napping again."

"You are the only person who would know about the affair to-night, according to their understanding of the case, and it is mighty important to them that you should be out of business. They won't trust the affair to one agent."

"I don't care if they send a dozen—now."

"What will you do with that fellow?"

"Oh, I'll take care of him."

"Well, you go ahead with him and I'll walk a little distance behind you. Don't let him get away from you, for our cake will be dough."

"He won't get away; and say, you needn't think I need a guard, either."

"You did just now. Go ahead. I've a right to walk where I please, I suppose."

Conners grunted some reply, and then he yanked his prisoner from the ground with no gentle hand.

"Hello!" he said. "Blessed if it isn't one of Marakoff's dealers. "It's Ivan. Hello, Ivan, how do you do?"

The captured assassin maintained a sullen silence.

"Don't want to talk, eh? Well, I'll find a way to make you. Did the colonel put you onto this job?"

Still silence.

Conners put one of his knuckles under Ivan's ear and began to press upon it, and he kept pressing harder and harder until the fellow cried out for mercy.

"Then answer me when I speak to you," said Conners. "Did he put you onto this job?"

"Yes, Tarvanieff."

"Sweet creature. Gentle as a lamb, isn't she, Nick? How much was she to pay you for it?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"That's a good boy. You're learning how to talk amazingly. Did Marakoff know that you had the job to do?"

"He knows about it if he's got ears. He was present when we talked it over."

"Indeed! And who else was present?"

"Madame's husband, that is all."

"How many more have been sent out to 'get' me, eh?"

"I don't know."

Conners twisted his knuckle again, and Ivan howled.

"Three," he said.

"What! The other dealers?"

"Yes."

"Did she suppose that nobody but dealers could do such a trick as this one?"

"She told us that the one who was successful would get five thousand dollars. She talked to us all together."

"And Marakoff sat with you and heard it all. That's fine. What an old scoundrel he is. I have thought many things about him, but I never did think he would stoop to murder. Ivan."

"Well, what?"

"Are the other three after me now?"

"Yes."

"And you each had a plan of your own, I suppose."

"Now, tell me what the plans of the others are, and I give you my word that I will make no charge against you, and that some time to-morrow I'll let you go scot-free."

"Is that straight, sir?"

"You bet it's straight, if I say so."

"Then I'll tell you."

"Well, what was Sacha's plan of campaign?"

"He is to lie in wait for you near your door, where you lodge. He thinks you'll go in about ten o'clock to-night, and he is going to shoot at you from behind a tree."

"Well, he wasn't so far wrong about the time. I wonder how he knew. And what was Peter's plan?"

"You know you go down E Street and there's a dark corner near Tenth. He's going to try to get you there."

"Humph! They seem to have figured mighty close. And now for Orloff's?"

"Orloff, like me, believed a knife the safest weapon. He used to be a locksmith, and his plan was to pick the lock of your door and get inside the house. He said the rest of us would all fail, but that he would do the business when you entered the door."

"By the powers, I shouldn't wonder if he would have done it, too, for I shouldn't have been looking for him there; only he'd have waited till after daylight to morrow,

for I had no intention of going to my house this night. Now, Ivan?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I let you go to-morrow, will you promise to leave the city within an hour, and the entire country within a week?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it's a bargain—that is, unless I find that you have lied to me. In that case it is all off."

"I have told you the whole truth."

"Well, let me bind up that hand of yours while we talk, because there are more questions I want to ask you. You'll answer them all, and truthfully; eh?"

"I will, sir."

"You know all about that abduction business for to-night, don't you?"

"I know something about it."

"Do you know, for instance, where they propose to take the prince after they capture him?"

"To a private yacht which Col. Turvanieff purchased right after he came here."

"A steam yacht?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is her name?"

"*Twilight*."

"And where is she moored?"

"Just below the Seventh Street wharf. She has two funnels. She is very fast."

"And what are their plans after they get the prince aboard?"

"They were to get down the river through the bay and into the ocean as quickly as possible. Out there somewhere there's a vessel of some kind cruising around waiting for them."

"Nick, you're a good guesser," said Conners, turning to the detective. Sure, it all looks like easy sailing now; eh?"

"Yes; let me ask Ivan a question or two."

"Go ahead, then."

"Ivan, how many people are mixed up in this conspiracy?"

"There are about thirty in all, sir."

"Do you know their names?"

"I know the names of most of them. I was one myself until now; the other three dealers, old Marakoff, and——"

"Never mind that now. While you are in prison to-night I want you to prepare me a list of all those names. Will you do that, and do it truthfully?"

"I will. You are going to spare me, why should I not treat you square?"

"That's right. Now, how many men are there aboard that yacht?"

"That I don't know, but I think there are a great many. Fifty at least; perhaps more."

"I can see your work cut out for you, Conners," said Nick to the officer.

"What! Fifty Russians? Sure I could take ten of our men and lick a thousand of them. You have to make a Russian mad before he will fight, for they have no love of country. And without love of country—well, what have you got left, I'd like to know."

"Your family," said Ivan, unexpectedly, "and my own is in Siberia."

"Ah! I see. Well, boy, that's too bad. I'm glad I said I'd let you go. Now, Nick, if you will stroll along behind me till I take care of this fellow for the night, I'll see you for a few moments to get your last orders, for it's under you I'm working to-night."

"Will you tell me one thing, please?" asked Ivan.

"Sure. What is it?"

"How did you find out about the abduction?"

"Great guns, man! Didn't you hear them tell us all about it last night when they made up the party for the prince. I'll be back in a minute, Nick, after you see me go inside with the lad here."

Nick kept the two well in view until they disappeared in the station where Ivan was locked up, and in a very few moments Conners came out again.

"Now, Mr. Yamagichi," he said, "what are your orders?"

"I see no reason to make any changes; do you?"

"No; only that I'll send an extra squad of men down to that yacht. I think we'll get aboard of her and take her early, so we'll be properly prepared to receive you when you arrive."

"Not on your life, Conners. It would never do at all."

"Why not?"

"Because one of them might escape. If so he would get the news to the gambling house in a twinkling. There are always telephones; they might even have a telephonic connection on board the yacht."

"That's right. You're right."

"Get your extra men down there, singly and in pairs, and keep them well concealed until the abduction party arrives. Then, capture us first. You'll have the general and me to help you capture the yacht."

"Right you are, Nick. You're boss."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE GAMBLING HOUSE.

Precisely at two o'clock that night, a carriage drew up in front of the Russian gambling house on K Street, and two gentlemen got out.

Both were apparently Japanese, and if at that moment any one of the officials of Washington had been passing, he would have been content to swear in court the next morning, that he had seen the Japanese prince entering a Russian club.

But none of them happened to be passing; in fact, there was not a pedestrian in sight at all. True, some distance down the street, standing before a pretentious mansion, was a private carriage with coachman and footman on the box, but other than that, there was nobody in sight—not even a policeman.

The two Japanese were, of course, Nick Carter and Gen. Yagarosi; but if the general had encountered the real prince at that moment, the latter would doubtless have fainted, believing that he saw his own ghost.

There was no hesitation at the doors this time.

They opened as if by magic as the two visitors approached, and standing on the threshold to receive them was Col. Marakoff in person.

And not until the door had closed, and they were well inside the house, did any of them utter a word; but then, Marakoff could contain himself no longer. To him a prince was a prince, no matter what country he hailed from, and therefore something to be reverenced.

"Prince," he said, remembering the injunction of the previous night, to use the title as a given name, "you have honored my house almost beyond its merits." And he bowed almost to the floor. "I trust you speak English, or Russian, for I do not understand Japanese."

"I speak English perfectly, thank you," replied the pseudo prince, returning the bow with a nod of his head. "Your welcome is very courteous."

"And I trust, prince, that you will go away with a better idea of the Russians than you have had in the past."

"I have always had the utmost respect for the Russians, sir," replied the general, with dignity.

Then Marakoff turned to Nick.

"Mr. Yamagichi," he said, with so much effusion that if Nick had not known of the plot to entrap them he would at once have suspected that there was something in the wind, "I am delighted to renew our acquaintance of last night. And now, gentlemen, will you step up to our saloon?"

He almost swept the floor with the bow he made to indicate that they were to precede him and at the top of the stairs they were met by negro attendants who relieved them of their coats and hats, silently, and in evident awe.

"This way, gentlemen, if you please," said Marakoff; and he ushered them into the great gambling room which has already been described.

Nick swept his eyes in one rapid and comprehensive glance around the room, and even he was amazed at the transformation that had been wrought.

The room was decorated from end to end with Japanese colors, intermingled with the Russ.

Palms, flowering plants, cut roses, flowers of all descriptions decorated the place, and it had been turned into a veritable garden.

And the people present—he saw at a glance that they were the same, but the three women were resplendent in full dress and fairly blazed with jewels, while the men had donned the uniforms of their respective ranks—if they had any—and were decorated with crosses and emblems, until the reception more resembled a military affair in Europe than anything else.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Marakoff, "the prince."

Nick could scarcely repress a smile at the absurdity of it all. They almost swept the floor with their courtesies and bows.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Marakoff again, "our esteemed friend, Mr. Yamagichi."

Again they courtesied, but not so profoundly.

Then they all fixed their eyes upon the pseudo prince, and waited in silence.

"It gives me great pleasure to be here," he said, slowly, for he had not expected to be called upon to make a speech. "I beg that you will do me one favor, and that is to receive me in the same spirit you do my friend here," and he laid his hand upon Nick's shoulder. "I appreciate all this courtesy very much, and now if you will be as familiar with me as you would if it were only my given name which made you call me prince, I shall be charmed."

"Will you have some refreshment, prince?" asked Marakoff.

"I thank you, no; at least not at present; later, perhaps. I shall not refuse to eat and drink with you. I hope you understand that."

"Ah! That's the idea."

"We are neither Japanese nor Russian to-night, prince," said Madame Turvanieff; "we are Washingtonians."

"An excellent thought. Let it be so," replied the general.

"Do you care to play at one of the games, prince?" again suggested Marakoff.

"Ah! Indeed! That is a pleasure I crave. In my own country I am accounted somewhat of a juggler with the cards. I was taught by an expert."

"Then we will stand no chance whatever against you," said one of the ladies.

"Not at all, if I deal them," replied the general, calmly; "but if you should deal, then it would be different. I

see a large table yonder. Shall I give you an exhibition of my power with the cards?"

"Please do so," exclaimed Turvanieff, in his gruff voice.

The general crossed to the table and called for a pack of cards.

When they were brought to him, he shuffled them rapidly in his hands, so rapidly in fact that the eye could not follow his motions, and even Nick was amazed, for the general had told him nothing of this accomplishment.

"Now," said the general, "I will deal you baccarat; but not for money; no. This is for experience."

He threw out a five, a four and a six, respectively.

"Now, make your bets as you will," he said, "but, of course, everything goes on the six; but you see, I turn a seven. Eh?"

"Can you do it again, prince?" asked one of the women who had not spoken.

"Assuredly. As many times as you please. See! I shuffle the cards; so! I permit you to cut them; so! Thank you. Now, I throw again, a five, a four and a six; and see! Again I have a seven. It is most simple."

"Yes; it looks so!" growled Turvanieff.

"So much for the baccarat," said the general. "Have you the cards for the faro, and will you permit me to deal for you? Or, no. I will not deal. I will prepare the cards and ask our host to deal."

A new pack was brought to him and he shuffled them as before—like lightning; so that the eyes were dizzy watching him.

Then, suddenly, he slipped it into the box and threw that upon the table.

"Now," he said, "if you will each take your stack of chips—no money, mind you, for this is juggling—I will coach this lady how to play, and she will not lose a bet throughout the entire deal. Are you agreed?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"You are all to play according to your own ideas. This lady will not put down her bet until the others have signified that they are through. So?"

"That is fair, else we would follow her lead," said Turvanieff, much of whose gruffness seemed to have disappeared to-night.

The play began, and with every turn of the cards, Madame Turvanieff won. She did not lose a bet nor skip a turn, and at the end of the deal, she even called the turn.

During all this scene, Nick kept himself purposely in the background. This was the general's grand scene; his [illegible] to follow.

But his eyes and his brain were busy all the same, for he could not help wondering how the capture before the [illegible] was to be made.

It must be remembered that he had determined to make very little resistance. For a little while he had decided to forget that he was Nick Carter and that he could fight against a score of men.

To carry out his scheme successfully to the end, it was necessary that he should act in this way; but all the same, there was a moment coming later, when he would need all his bravery and daring, although he did not know it then.

Gradually, while he watched, he drew away from the others until he succeeded in half concealing himself behind one of the larger plants with which the room was decorated, and from there, watching through the doorway into the hall, he saw first one, and then another, until he counted seven men pass silently down the stairs to the ground floor.

It was evident that they came from the upper floor of the house, and were now stationing themselves below in order that there should be no possibility of escape.

"Plainly they mean to offer us no chance to get away," he mused. "Doubtless there are as many more still above, who will swoop down upon us at the proper moment."

But the game of faro was now over, and the party was grouped around the table discussing the wonderful ability of the prince.

Suddenly Madame Turvanieff raised her eyes and glanced hastily and somewhat apprehensively around her. She had missed Nick.

He saw that she had, and purposely drew further back among the plants, to see what she would do.

It was evident that she was startled; and then suddenly she left the group and darted to the door. Then she returned and walked the length of the room. Her excitement was now intense, so Nick decided to relieve her anxiety, and therefore as she was passing him on her way back, he spoke quietly to her.

"Has madame lost something?" he asked.

She almost cried out in her surprise and joy upon discovering him.

"Yes; you!" she replied, quickly.

"You do me great honor, madame, to have missed me."

"Why, it really frightened me," she said, still much moved. "I did not know what had become of you. I was afraid——".

"Of what, madame?"

"That you had gone away."

"What! And left my prince?"

"No," she replied, archly, for she had entirely recovered now; "I was afraid that you had gone away and left me."

Nick bowed, took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"Madame," he said, "I am speechless. You overwhelm me."

"It is you who have overwhelmed me," she retorted, turning her face away from him.

"Ah!" thought Nick. "I think I see the game now. It is to begin by a scene of jealousy. Madame is to make love to me and her husband is to discover it. Then, while he is quarreling with me, and while the others group around us, crowding the general out, those men down-stairs are to creep in silently, throw a blanket over the supposed prince's head, and carry him away. I wonder if they intend to leave me behind after all. By Jove, I'll see that they don't do it, and if Turvanieff gets close enough to me, I'll strike at least one blow before I gracefully permit them to capture me."

Aloud, he said:

"Madame! Madame!"

"Have you not seen? Have you not known?" she whispered with well simulated emotion. "After you played with me last night, I could not forget you. When we met at the capitol—ah! it seemed as if I could not tear myself away."

"Madame, what shall I say? What shall I do? I am overwhelmed."

"Even my husband noticed my excitement at the capitol to-day, and he is ragingly jealous of you already."

"Is it so, indeed?"

"Hush! He is coming this way. Let us hope that he will not see us."

"But," said Nick, playing the part for which she had cast him, "I have done nothing; you have done nothing—yet."

"Ah! Here you are, eh?" interrupted the gruff voice of Turvanieff, in a tone so loud that it was heard by everybody in the room. "What! You Japanese dog, cannot you find enough women in the world, without making love to my wife before my very eyes?"

The others had turned with the precision of a stage rehearsal, and in an instant they had grouped themselves around the three in such a manner as to force the general in the background.

Nick could see him through the throng, for the general had not anticipated this move and wished to see what was going on.

"I have not made love to your wife," he said, just at the instant when he saw several men crowd through the doorway and approach the supposed prince from behind.

"You lie, you dog!" roared Turvanieff.

He said it at just the instant when the men threw a blanket over the general's head, and, lifting him from the floor, started rapidly away toward the doorway again; and as he said it, he came a step nearer to the detective.

Like a bolt of lightning, Nick's fist shot out then, and it struck the big Russian fairly on the point of his chin.

The force of the blow lifted him from his feet, and he dropped like a clod of earth to the floor, quivering.

At the same instant, Nick forced his way through the crowd and sprang after the general, for he was determined not to let them have all of the game their way.

As it happened he reached the doorway at almost the same instant as the men who were carrying off the general, and he seized one of them and whirled him around with such force that he sent him spinning across the room against the others who had now turned to rush after him.

Several of them went down in the contact; but now the hallway seemed to be filled with men who crowded through upon them, and these, with the aid of those behind, soon overpowered the supposed prince and his secretary—the general and Nick—for each of them seemed now to offer only a feeble resistance.

Then the blanket was taken from the general's head, and they were each hastily searched to discover if they were armed—but it did not occur to them to examine Nick Carter's coat sleeves. They did not know about the little weapons he always carried there.

Then two chairs were brought forward, and the two prisoners were seated in them and warned to remain there on pain of instant death if they made another attempt to escape.

Turvanieff was still unconscious on the floor. He might have been counted out several times before he stirred again.

His wife was bending over him, vainly endeavoring to restore him, and, altogether, the scene formed a tableau worthy of a frame.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" asked the general, calmly, preserving his dignity as a supposed prince of the blood. "I was received here as a guest, in good faith. Why was I and my secretary attacked?"

It was Marakoff who replied.

"It is for the good of the cause, prince," he said, with a coarse laugh. "We have orders to take you to Russia, and we mean to do it."

"To take me to Russia? Why?" It was the general's wish to get all the particulars of the conspiracy he could.

"Ask that question of the officials you will meet when you get there, prince."

"The officials? Do you mean to say that official Russia has ordered and directed this outrage upon my person?"

Marakoff saw that he had gone too far.

"I mean to say that you are going to Russia, and that you will remain there until it is the pleasure of some person higher in authority than I am, to liberate you."

"Would the empire of Russia conspire to such an act as this?" insisted the general.

"Maybe so. You can call it that. The conspiracy of an empire. That's good enough."

"Are you going to take me, too?" asked Nick, smiling.

"We've got to, more's the pity. You weren't wanted, but now you've got to go."

It was at this instant that Turvanieff, having staggered to his feet with the assistance of his wife, broke through the group, and approaching Nick without a word, struck him with the flat of his hand across the cheek.

All the blood in Nick Carter's veins seemed to boil, then.

He leaped to his feet with a bound, and before a person there could do aught to prevent him, he seized the huge Russian in his strong, Samson-like arms, raised him clear from the floor, and hurled him against the wall with a force that shook the building; and Turvanieff, a trembling, disfigured mass, fell to the floor, bleeding from his nose and ears.

But the others were upon Nick in an instant, and he permitted himself to be forced back again into the chair.

"Marakoff," he said, quietly, "you had better attend to your friend. I am afraid I hurt him that time."

"He deserved to be hurt for that. I don't blame you in the least; but heavens, man, how did you do it?"

"With my little arms," replied Nick, smiling at them as he had smiled upon them the preceding night.

And now it was Madame Turvanieff who suddenly appeared upon the scene, and it was evident that she was mad with fury, for she tore her way through the group as fiercely as a tigress, and with a glittering poniard in her hand, leaped full at Nick Carter's throat.

But Nick had seen her coming and was prepared for her, if the others were not.

When she sprang upon him, he rose to meet her, and seizing her by the wrists, placed them both quickly together, grasped them in one of his own hands, and with the other took the weapon from her.

Then, with a quick turn, he seated her in the chair he had occupied, saying, with a bow:

"Madame, permit me."

Then, with a spring he reached the general's side.

"My prince," he exclaimed, "shall I fight our way out with this?"

"No; let them have their way. They would only murder us in the end," was the reply.

At the same instant he was seized from behind—as he had intended he should be—and his hands were hastily bound a great deal behind his back.

"Now," said Marakoff, "we must make haste. There is little time to lose. It will soon be light. Let us go."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S BRAVEST ACT.

The reader must not suppose that Nick Carter permitted himself to be bound without knowing how to loose himself when the time should come to do so.

He knew thoroughly that trick of swelling the muscles of the wrists and holding them so while the operation of binding was going on, and he had no difficulty in performing it now, for the men engaged in this affair, he understood at a glance, were novices.

Therefore, when the binding was accomplished, and he relaxed his muscles, the cords hung loosely upon him, so that at any moment he desired, he could easily cast them off and stand free as any of them there.

Nor did they hesitate to subject the supposed prince to the same indignity. His hands were also bound behind him.

But in his case they were no more successful than they were with the detective.

It must be remembered that the general was a Japanese army officer, high in rank, and that all such officers are trained in the arts of the Jiu-Jitsu.

He, too, knew how to distend the muscles of his wrists, and, therefore, the binding to which he was subjected was no more operative than it was in the case of Nick Carter.

It was all accomplished in a very short time, and then the final preparations were made to leave the house.

As soon as the supposed prince arrived at the gambling house that night and was well inside, a servant of Marakoff's had gone out to the carriage, paid the driver liberally, and informed him that the gentlemen did not desire him to wait; but this, Nick had, of course, reckoned upon.

Altogether, not much more than two hours had been passed inside the house before they were ready to leave it, and all this time the private equipage, with its coachman and footman on the box, had stood before the mansion, several houses away, waiting.

Naturally, Marakoff had been informed of the presence of that carriage there, and had, for a while, regarded the fact suspiciously, but when he was told that it had driven away several times, only to return again each time, and that the lights in the house before which it stood were still burning, his suspicions were allayed.

He regarded the incident merely in the light of a late conference of some kind in that house.

And now, his own carriage was at the door of the gambling house waiting to receive the prisoners and to bear them away into captivity.

At the moment when they were ready to start, Marakoff stepped in front of the general.

"Prince," he said, with a cold sneer on his face, "I should regret to be obliged to subject you to the indignity

of placing a gag in your mouth, and if you will give me your word of honor for yourself and your secretary also, that neither of you will attempt to cry out or to call attention to yourself from anybody while we are driving through the streets of the city, I will be relieved of the necessity."

"I will give you my word to that effect," replied the general, quietly.

"There is a carriage standing in front of a house near here," continued Marakoff. "You might be tempted."

"I have given you my word, that is sufficient."

"Very good. I will take the chance."

"Where are you taking us?" asked Nick, still smiling.

"To Russia, as you have already been told."

"Ah! And is that very far away?"

"Come! We waste time," said Marakoff to his followers. "Is the carriage ready?"

"Yes."

"Then we will go. And now one word more to you, prince, and to you also, Yamagichi."

"Pray, no more than one, if you love me, for I am tired of your prattle."

"It is this: If either of you make any attempt to break for liberty, the prince will be instantly killed. The man who will accompany us in the carriage will sit opposite the prince, and he has positive instructions to kill him if such a thing should happen. He will not hesitate to obey his instructions."

"You have good servants, Marakoff," said Nick.

The lights in the house were turned out. Long cloaks were thrown over the shoulders of Nick and the general to conceal the fact that they were bound should there happen to be prying eyes about—and then they left the house.

The carriage was, of course, a closed one; and there were two men on the box.

Now, reader, Nick Carter, after the interview with Ivan in Lafayette Square, had anticipated almost this entire situation, and he had gone to the general, and they had spent two hours or more in arranging exactly what they should do, in order that they might act entirely in unison. This statement is made in order that it may be understood how the resulting incidents happened.

When they entered the carriage, Nick and the general were compelled to sit on the forward seat—that is, with their backs to the driver.

Then Marakoff took his seat opposite Nick, and the man to whom he had referred as being prepared to murder the prince, sat opposite the general.

Instantly, when the door was closed, they started away at a brisk trot, and a moment later Nick and the general quietly slipped the bonds from their wrists so they were hand free and prepared to act when the moment should come to do so.

Their route was through K Street directly to Seventh, and just before they reached the turn, Nick Carter uttered a loud sneeze.

At the instant he emitted it, he threw himself forward, and, with lightning-like motion, seized Marakoff by the throat with both hands; and the general, no less quick than the detective, did the same for his vis a-vis.

The sneeze had disconcerted the two men, and thrown them off their guard, and it was for that reason that Nick and the general were able to seize them so securely.

Nick's grasp upon Marakoff's throat was terrible; the general's hold upon his man was the Jiu-Jitsu, and it paralyzed every muscle in his body.

Marakoff struggled desperately for an instant, but then Nick loosed one hand from the throat and struck him a terrific blow on the temple with his right fist.

A second blow followed the first, and Marakoff sank back entirely unconscious, whereupon Nick repeated the operation upon the man whom the general was holding, and with the same result.

"Now, general," he said, in a low tone, "we have the game in our own hands. You have cord enough there to bind the hands and feet of your man, while I will do the same for Marakoff. Then I will make gags of our handkerchiefs, and the thing will be done."

They both set to work eagerly, and by the time the carriage arrived at Pennsylvania Avenue and was crossing that thoroughfare, the positions of the occupants of the coach had been entirely changed.

Marakoff and his minion were huddled in the corners of the carriage on the front seat, securely bound and gagged, while Nick and the general had lighted cigars and were leaning back comfortably smoking and talking together in low tones.

Nick had agreed with Connors, who was one of the occupants of the carriage which had been waiting before

the other house on K Street, that if they were successful in capturing whosoever should be in their carriage with them, that they would light cigars, and would wave the bright sparks of light emitted from them, in circles out of the carriage window.

Thus, as soon as they passed into the southwest section—that is, into Seventh Street, below Pennsylvania Avenue—they made the signal repeatedly, knowing well that it could not be seen from the box of their own conveyance.

It was only a moment later when they could hear a carriage driving furiously behind them, the horses on a gallop, and ere two more streets had been passed, the carriage of Conners overtook and passed them, and then turned and stood squarely across the road, effectually blocking it.

Then four men leaped from the inside of the other carriage and sprang toward the one in which Nick and the general had so lately been prisoners; and the four men held ominous-appearing revolvers in their hands which they presented at the two men on the box.

"Hands up!" commanded the stern voice of Conners. "Quick! Or you are dead men!"

There was nothing for them to do but to obey, for there was no mistaking the meaning in the voice of Conners.

"Now, jump down off that box, both of you," he commanded, "and if either one of you makes an attempt to escape or to fight, I'll kill you as I would a rat. Quick! We've no time to lose."

They obeyed; and the instant they touched the ground, they were seized, their weapons were taken from them, they were handcuffed, hand and foot, then gagged, and ignominiously thrown inside the carriage in which Conners had been a passenger.

Next, Marakoff and his man inside the hack in which Nick had been riding, were taken out and thrust into the other equipage to keep their drivers company. Then one of Conners' men leaped upon the box, and another inside to watch over the prisoners.

"Take good care of them, Felix," ordered Conners. "If you get them locked up in time, you may return to the wharf, although I think things will be over by that time. Skip!"

The carriage and drivers rapidly back toward the city with the prisoners, while Conners and his three remaining men accommodated themselves in and upon Nick's conveyance—two on the box, and Conners with the remaining one, inside with Nick and the general.

Then the journey toward the wharf was continued.

"Worked like grease, didn't it, Nick?" said Conners.

"Beautifully," replied Nick. "My only fear was that another of the carriages, which must bring our six conspirators to the wharf, might happen along before we wanted them to."

"Well, I feared that, too, but it did not, thank Heaven."

"What arrangements did you make, Conners, for the capture of the yacht?" asked Nick.

"Well, I've got a tugboat lying off and on close by her, where she is moored, and I've got a couple of gasoline launches close to her, for one thing. Then there are the men ashore who are waiting for us. There won't be much difficulty about it, I reckon."

"I should say not. You have planned well, Conners."

"I plan? It's all your plan save only the tug and the launches. Lord, Nick, but you did the thing up brown!"

"I think that the empire of Japan is under very great obligation to each of you," said the general, quietly. "The mikado shall hear a true account of all that has happened, when I have the felicity to be in his presence again; and if you, Mr. Conners, should ever come to Japan——"

"Thanks all the same, general, but I never will. Little old United States is good enough for me."

"You are a patriot, Mr. Conners."

"Yes, sirree! I have two countries. A mother country and a father country. This one is my father country; I lost my mother, Ireland, when I was six years old—and my own mother, too, God bless her!"

The general raised his hat, and was silent. He understood such emotions.

"How many men have you ashore down here, Conners?" asked Nick.

"A dozen, no less."

"And in the boats?"

"Oh, well, maybe twenty altogether."

"That should be amply sufficient."

"Sufficient? Why, we could have done it with half the number—but I wanted to be sure."

"Here we are," said Nick, peering from the window of the carriage. "What were your instructions to the men on the box?"

"Simply to drive under the shadow of the old steamboat sheds and wait, and they're doing it now."

"It ought not to be long before at least one of the other carriages arrives, but the second may be delayed. I fancy they will have some trouble reviving Turvanieff."

"Did you hurt him, Nick?"

"Just a little."

Conners chuckled.

"You see," said Nick, "there will have to be two carriages, because there are six in that party, and it may be that some of the extra men in the house were from the yacht; in that case there will be more. I fancy that Madame Turvanieff, and her invalided husband, will travel alone in one of the vehicles."

"There's one coming now," said Conners. "I can hear it."

"Then we might as well get out and be ready to receive them—unless they make a signal as they approach."

"Well, and what if they do?"

"We must let them go aboard the yacht in peace—unless they are this outfit and make an effort to investigate."

The approaching carriage was scarcely a block away now, and they could see it in the glare of the electric lights, for daylight had not yet begun to appear.

"Sure, it's Felix coming back," said Conners.

"No, it is not," replied Nick. "It is part of the outfit that was in the gambling house, and they have put two men on the box to accommodate as many as possible, same as we did. I think you will find that the carriage contains two of the women and two of the men who are in this plot; and on the box, two of the men who had been introduced into the house to render assistance. The two women will come later with four of the others."

"Shall we nail them here, Nick?"

"Wait. Let us see what is best to be done."

They stood silently waiting until the carriage arrived at a point opposite them, and quietly passed. It was evident that they did not see the carriage in the shadow.

"They have not seen us," said Nick. "Let them go. We will wait for the others."

They had not long to wait.

Scarcely five minutes elapsed before a second vehicle appeared, and, as the other had done, it passed them with [illegible] speed.

From the shadows where our friends were concealed, they could see the [illegible] from the two carriages, and from the first, as Nick had predicted, two women and two men alighted, and from the second, six big men got out.

Then the men on the boxes got down, matches were burned, and after a moment boats put out from the yacht and they were presently taken aboard.

"Sure, Nick," said Conners, "you're letting them all get aboard. Maybe they'll slip their cable and be off."

"You forget," replied Nick, "that their most important passenger, the prince, has not yet arrived; and now we know their signal to go aboard. Three matches burned, one after another."

"Right you are."

"There won't be more than one more, and that will contain the Turvanieffs. We will stop that one. Has it occurred to you, Conners, why they paid no attention to this carriage, even if they saw it?"

"No."

"Simply because it is part of their scheme to abandon their vehicles and permit the horses to wander where they will. Somewhere, you will find the regular drivers, bound and gagged."

"By thunder, that's so!"

"The remaining carriage is coming. We will go up the street a way and meet it. Come, boys, all of you. General, you may remain here if you will be so good."

They ran up the street rapidly and succeeded in stopping the vehicle a block away.

Conners and Nick stepped to either window, smashed in the glasses, and poked their revolvers through, while Conners' men held up the two men on the box.

Only Madame Turvanieff and her wounded husband were inside, as Nick had supposed would be the case.

"Madame," said Nick, "it is all up. You cannot hope to escape, so surrender quietly."

"Who are you?" she demanded, in a broken voice.

"Never mind that now. I will tell you later. Conners, have your men got material to bind these people?"

"Sure they have."

"Then have them attend to it, and detail two of them to take them back to the city."

"Correct, sir."

"And now come. We will go aboard the yacht."

"Ah! That is what I want."

"Call your men together while I make the signal on the wharf."

"That's soon done."

The men were called together. They had rowboats in readiness, and Nick gave them their orders.

"I shall signal for the boat from the yacht," he said. "One, or two, may come in response to it. We will step quietly into the boat or boats, for it is doubtful if their oarsmen know whom they are expecting. The moment we are in the boats we will overpower the rowers, and pass them ashore. Then we will row quietly to the yacht. Now, Conners, you take charge of your own men, and you follow us in your own boats so that you will arrive as soon as we do. When you see us step aboard, give the signal for your tug and the launches. The rest is easy."

"Maybe so. All right."

Nick stepped to the edge of the wharf and lighted three matches, one after another, and in another moment was gratified to see only one boat put off from the side of the yacht.

"Good!" he said. "The way is easy now."

The boat drew up at the wharf silently, and Nick Carter sprang down into it.

He was quickly followed by one of Conners' men, and in an instant they had seized the two oarsmen, throttled them so they could make no sound, and rapped them on their heads with the butts of their revolvers—for Conners had supplied Nick—and passed them to the others on the wharf.

Then, without a word, several of Conners' men got into the boat with Nick, and they put off for the yacht.

Almost immediately after them, but far enough distant so as not to attract attention from the yacht, Conners, and his remaining shore men, followed in their boats.

The plan was working as Nick had devised.

Nick's boat reached the yacht, and Nick leaped upon the deck, followed by the men who had accompanied him, and at the same instant a light flashed up in the darkness from the river.

"Hands up, all of you!" cried the detective. "You are prisoners of the United States of America! The first who opposes me, hangs for it."

The other boats touched the yacht at that instant, and a throng of men seemed to leap upon the deck from every quarter.

The men on the yacht were utterly taken by surprise, and there was not much fight in them, evidently, for they offered no resistance whatever, and Conners' men crowded them toward the fo'castle until they had them huddled in a mass at the bow of the yacht.

As yet there was no sign of life from the cabin.

The attack and the victory had been consummated so swiftly and so silently, that the people in the cabin had heard nothing.

"Come, Conners," said Nick. "Call two or three of your men and we will go to the cabin."

They went aft together.

The cabin was a superstructure, half on deck, and half in the hold of the vessel, which was only a small, but a very swift yacht; and it was entered by means of what is called a half-hatch.

This was closed, but Nick opened it gently and silently and looked within.

There were six persons there—the two men and two women he had seen at the gambling house, and two officers of the yacht.

Nick stepped down the short companion way, followed by Conners and his three men, and so silently that not one of the occupants of the cabin heard them or was aware of their presence until they stood directly before them.

Then they started back with cries—the women with screams, for they saw revolvers leveled at their heads and hearts.

"You are my prisoners," said Nick, quietly, "and I advise that you make no resistance."

The men threw up their hands as with one accord; but one of the women was less inclined to submit.

She leaped away from the table where she had been seated and seized something, that rested on a cushion near the bulkhead.

"Never!" she cried. Take that! We die together!"

She raised it high above her head to hurl it.

"Look out, Nick. It's a bomb!" cried Conners.

The woman threw it, straight at Nick Carter's head; and he, realizing what was coming, and that it was more than likely that they would all be blown to atoms together, remembered his baseball days.

He put out his hands; he caught the missile straight between his hands, and pulling them back quickly, destroyed the force of the impact and the jar.

There was no explosion, and Nick Carter had done the bravest act of his life.

"Thank you, madame," he said. Then he carried the bomb on deck and dropped it into the river.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 424, will contain "A Queen of Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Nemesis."

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386—When Aces Were Trumps; or, A Hard Game to Play.
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